



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Fifty-eighth session

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives**

### **Statement submitted by Mouvement pour la défense de l’humanité et l’abolition de la torture, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



## Statement

In Cameroon, violence against women persists in all of its forms. Although the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted as a result of efforts, took effect on 3 September 1981, women continue to be victims of violence. Under article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the United Nations in December 1993 (General Assembly resolution 48/104), “the term ‘violence against women’ means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.

Women are subjected to the following types of violence:

1. Physical violence: (a) physical abuse takes the forms of spousal punishment, punishment for misconduct, punishment of recalcitrant girls and extraction of avowals. These forms of violence are generally accepted as a purely family matter and victims do not dare appeal to the judicial system; (b) excessive household work. Domestic tasks, when they are incumbent on the woman, are compounded in rural areas by her sharing the obligation of looking after livestock and in urban areas by professional obligations. Nobody admits that a woman who has spent the day at home may feel tired, although she has been working hard all day and is physically exhausted;

2. Psychological violence;

3. Arbitrary deprivation of rights. In the following areas, among others, women are arbitrarily deprived of their most elementary rights, especially in parts of Cameroon where a Moslem culture prevails: education and training, employment, politics, inheritance rights, health and right to property;

4. Spousal violence, including polygamy. Polygamy constitutes violence against women (conflicts between co-wives and between spouses (husband and wife)). In rural areas, polygamy is more or less tolerated but in urban areas it constitutes a tangible source of violence. Injustice fuelled by the husband compels co-wives to question their own value and even to resort to self-flagellation. They wonder whether they themselves may be the cause of their predicament. Some doubt their natural beauty and charm and take up depigmentation;

5. Violence related to traditional practices: (a) genital mutilation may cause infection, haemorrhage, transmission of HIV/AIDS or STIs and childbirth complications. These risks occur particularly in the north of the country, where a Moslem culture prevails; (b) early and forced marriages, which, a form of violence in themselves, lead to further violence due to lack of actual affection. Yet marriage is subject to regulations in Cameroon; (c) levirate: in certain ethnic groups in Cameroon, custom not only prevents a widow from taking possession of her husband's assets, but also subjects her to cruel traditional rituals, such as going unwashed for weeks or sleeping on the ground;

6. Sexual violence: (a) rape: in the three months following the latest conflict in the Central African Republic, the Association recorded more than 100 cases of rape. Women who survive war are generally victims of sexual violence. At the national level, the situation remains highly alarming because of the silence of

the victims, who fear reprisals; (b) sexual harassment: women experience sexual harassment every day but often fail to report it for lack of proof and especially out of shame.

### **Causes**

The main causes of all these forms of violence are the weight of tradition, ignorance, poverty, socio-economic disruptions, inconsistencies in the law, non-compliance with provisions protecting women, and armed conflicts.

### **Impact on the victims and society**

Women's daily suffering as victims of violence leads to depression, distress, psychosomatic disorders, compulsive or obsessional behaviour, flagging self-esteem, and self-mutilation, including suicide and other acts rife with risks. By reducing women's participation, society perpetuates social inequality, inequity, injustice and insecurity. Yet all reports of the major institutions and the Fourth World Conference on Women have stressed that sustainable development requires a better quality of life and improved living conditions for all, regardless of gender. As long as inequalities, injustice and the domination of some over others continue, sustainable development will remain a utopia and the MDGs a mere dream. However, thanks to the dedicated persons fighting for the cause of women, those goals shall not remain a dream.

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